

I claim:

1. A merchandiser for elongate loaves of fresh baked bread and the like, comprising:
 - an open rack having a generally vertically extending rear wall, a generally vertically extending front wall spaced apart a predetermined distance from said rear wall, a pair of generally vertically extending sidewalls disposed vertically between said rear wall and said front wall along opposite sides thereof, and a generally horizontally extending bottom wall disposed horizontally between said rear wall, said sidewalls and said front wall along lower portions thereof; said bottom wall having at least one opening to permit the vertical flow of air therethrough, and being configured to abuttingly support thereon ends of elongate bread loaves, such that a plurality of the bread loaves are removably retained between said rear wall, said front wall and said sidewalls in a generally vertical, freestanding, side-by-side relationship;
 - a base having a lower portion thereof shaped for abutting support on an associated floor surface, an upper portion thereof supporting said open rack thereon, and a generally enclosed interior; and
 - a heater disposed in the interior of said base, and selectively heating the air disposed therein, such that air heated in the interior of said base flows upwardly through said opening in said bottom wall of said rack, through said open rack, along opposite sides of the vertically stacked bread loaves to maintain the fresh baked smell and feel of the bread loaves.
2. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 1, wherein:
 - said heater comprises an electrical resistant heater sized to heat the air flowing through the vertically stacked bread loaves to a temperature in the range of 90-100 degrees Fahrenheit to alleviate premature drying of the bread loaves.
3. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 2, wherein:
 - said front wall has a height that is substantially less than the height of said rear wall to permit easy withdrawal of the bread loaves from an upper portion of said open rack.

4. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 3, wherein:
said bottom wall of said open rack is constructed from a plurality of laterally spaced apart, horizontally extending slats.
5. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 4, wherein:
said opening comprises a plurality of elongate slots defined between said slats.
6. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 5, wherein:
said rear wall of said open rack is constructed from a plurality of vertically spaced apart, horizontally extending slats.
7. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 6, wherein:
said front wall of said open rack is constructed from a plurality of vertically spaced apart, horizontally extending slats.
8. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 7, wherein:
said sidewalls of said open rack are constructed from a plurality of vertically spaced apart, horizontally extending slats.
9. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 8, wherein:
said slats are constructed from wood.
10. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 9, wherein:
said heater is without a fan, such that heated air in said base flows through said open rack solely through convection.
11. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 10, wherein:
said slats in said rear wall are spaced apart more closely at the lower portion thereof than at an upper portion thereof to deflect the heated air upwardly through the vertically oriented bread loaves retained in said open rack.

12. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 11, wherein:
said base is box-shaped and includes a generally open bottom.
13. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 12, wherein:
said base includes a generally open top disposed below said bottom wall of said open rack.
14. A merchandiser as set forth in claim 13, wherein:
said base includes a plurality of wheels to rollingly support the merchandiser.
15. A method of merchandising elongate loaves of bread and the like, comprising:
providing a merchandiser having an open rack with a generally vertical rear wall, a generally vertical front wall, a pair of generally vertical side walls and a bottom wall with at least one opening to permit the vertical flow of air therethrough, and a base with a generally closed interior to support said open rack, and a heater disposed in the interior of said base;
providing a plurality of elongate fresh baked loaves of bread;
stacking the loaves of bread vertically in the open rack;
positioning the merchandiser in a location visible to a customer; and
actuating the heater to maintain the temperature of the loaves of bread in the merchandiser at a temperature not to exceed 120 degrees to retain the fresh baked smell and feel of the bread loaves.
16. The method of merchandising according to claim 15, wherein said positioning step comprises locating the merchandiser adjacent a checkout counter of a retail store.
17. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 15, wherein said providing step includes providing an electrically resistant heater which heats the air flowing through the vertically stacked bread loaves to a temperature in the range of 90-100 degrees Fahrenheit.

18. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 17, wherein said providing step includes providing the front wall with a height that is substantially less than the height of the rear wall to permit easy withdrawal of the bread loaves from an upper portion of said open rack.

19. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 18, wherein said providing step includes providing the bottom wall of the open rack with a plurality of laterally spaced apart, horizontally extending slats.

20. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 19, wherein said providing step includes defining the at least one opening as a plurality of elongate slots between the slats.

21. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 20, wherein said providing step includes constructing the rear wall of the open rack from a plurality of vertically spaced apart, horizontally extending slats.

22. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 21, wherein said providing step includes constructing the front wall of the open rack from a plurality of vertically spaced apart, horizontally extending slats.

23. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 22, wherein said providing step includes constructing the sidewalls of the open rack from a plurality of vertically spaced apart, horizontally extending slats.

24. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 23, wherein said providing step includes providing slats constructed from wood.

25. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 24, wherein said actuating step includes actuating the heater and moving the air in the base convectively.

26. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 25, wherein said providing step includes providing slats in the rear wall which are spaced apart more closely at a lower portion thereof than at an upper portion thereof.
27. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 26, wherein said providing step includes providing the base with a box-shape which includes a generally open bottom.
28. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 27, wherein said providing step includes providing the base with a generally open top disposed below the bottom wall of the open rack.
29. A method of merchandising as set forth in claim 28, wherein said providing step includes providing the base with a plurality of wheels to rollingly support the merchandiser.